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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BIOTECH: IIP VISITOR GIDDINGS INFORMS VATICAN OFFICIALS, DIPLOMATS

SUMMARY

1. Embassy hosted Dr. Val Giddings, Vice-President for Food and Agriculture at the US Biotechnology Industry Organization, for a two-day program of talks and presentations with Holy See officials and the Vatican diplomatic community in late September. The Coordinator of International Information Programs (IIP) sponsored the visit. Giddings' presentations debunked the popular mythology surrounding agricultural biotech and highlighted the moral imperative of developing biotech foods, given their potential for alleviating famine in developing countries.

ONE-ON-ONE CONTACT

2. Giddings' program included one-on-one meetings with key Vatican biotech players including officials at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Holy See's Permanent Observer to the FAO and WFP, and the vice-president of the Pontifical Council for Life. Ambassador Nicholson hosted a working lunch where Giddings met with scientists, Italian agricultural specialists and Vatican officials to discuss biotech issues. These meetings reinforced our effort to expand understanding among key Vatican decision makers and to resolve some of their outstanding concerns.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

3. At a public lecture at the prestigious Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University, Giddings addressed common misconceptions on biotech and the moral aspects of the question. Following the speech and a question and answer period, Giddings spoke to journalists from the Regina Apostolorum newsletter and ANSA, the principal Italian news agency, about the many biotech "myths" circulating in Europe. Additionally, Vatican Radio interviewed Giddings about the scientific and moral/ethical aspects of biotechnology. His comments were broadcast to an international audience with millions of potential listeners. The interview was later available on Vatican Radio's web site.

WORKING THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

4. Central to Giddings' visit was an extremely successful round-table hosted by the Ambassador with diplomats accredited to the Holy See and selected representatives of the Holy See. Giddings reviewed key issues surrounding biotechnology and refuted specious anti-biotech arguments proffered by some in the group. Some 30 ambassadors accredited to the Vatican attended the session in a crowd of nearly 40 diplomatic personnel. At the request of attendees, Embassy provided additional reading material on biotech issues, and a copy of Giddings power point presentation to interested embassies following the event. Ambassadors from Israel, Canada, Greece and Germany emerged as allies for biotech promotion at the Holy See.

COMMENT: VISIT SET STAGE FOR VATICAN CONFERENCE, AND MORE

5. The Holy See's Council for Justice and Peace will host an international meeting in Vatican City in mid-November to consider the science, ethics and moral implications of biotechnology (reftels). Giddings' visit helped set the stage for the Vatican conference, providing useful background and ammunition for those open to the development of biotech foods, and challenging the naysayers, as well as framing the issue for the wider Vatican community. Our outreach to the diplomatic corps has proven especially

important as other missions have begun to join us in pressing the Holy See on the issue and could help influence their capitals by linking the scientific and moral arguments regarding biotech foods. Giddings' visit advanced an ongoing effort to build the moral case for biotech to a Vatican and diplomatic audience attuned to moral issues.

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16. Embassy thanks IIP for providing the funding and support for Giddings' visit. Such outreach is key to winning over the Vatican to the potential of biotechnology in combating hunger and disease; and protecting the environment, especially in the developing world.

Nicholson

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